



February 27, 2023

Leslie Blatteau–New Haven Federation of Teachers

In Support Of: House Bill 5673: AN ACT CONCERNING THE REFORMATION OF CERTAIN TAXES AND TAX EQUITY.

Good afternoon Senator Fonfara, Representative Horn, and members of the Finance, Revenue and Bonding Committee. My name is Leslie Blatteau and I'm a teacher, parent, and resident in New Haven. I am the President of the New Haven Federation of Teachers, a union representing over 1700 educators in New Haven Public Schools. I am an At-Large Vice President of AFT-CT, a 30,000 member statewide union representing 10,000 teachers and educators in CT. NHFT and AFT-CT belong to Recovery For All – a statewide coalition fighting for a better future for Connecticut, bringing together more than 60 community, faith, and labor organizations.

I am testifying in strong support of House Bill 5673: An Act Concerning The Reformation Of Certain Taxes And Tax Equity. As the wealthiest state in the country, Connecticut should be an example where every family has what we need to live a good life. But instead we have a state where hundreds of thousands of working people are struggling, while a handful of wealthy corporations and wealthy residents continue to get even wealthier. The scale of this crisis demands a bold response—this state is no longer a place where working people can thrive. We have the responsibility and the resources to enact policies that provide for Connecticut families.

As a longtime teacher I know firsthand how our students, families, and educators in New Haven continue to make do with less. Our schools are more crowded and less funded than other wealthier districts in this state and our students take on much more of a responsibility for contributing to their families' economic well being than their wealthier peers. It is not uncommon for New Haven high school students to work between 20-40 hours a week to help their families keep up with rising rents and skyrocketing grocery bills. It is not uncommon for families in New Haven to move several times in one year as affordable housing becomes harder and harder to secure. And it is not uncommon for teachers, social workers, and counselors, members of our union, to provide support—food, clothing, toiletries—to students and families to help them through these economic crises. These examples are proof of Connecticut's failure to

commit to equity and economic justice. In fact, Connecticut is ranked as having the 5th largest wealth gap in the country. But it doesn't have to be this way.

While most residents are struggling, the wealthy few are prospering. Since the start of the pandemic, Connecticut's 12 billionaires, who are worth a combined total of \$75 billion, have seized more than \$15 billion in additional wealth. It is incomprehensible that we have such extreme wealth in our state and we have current budget proposals from the Governor that slash funding for higher education, flat fund preK-12 public education, fail to fully fund childcare programs, and fail to prioritize health care for every Connecticut resident.

We can and should flood our communities with resources. And we can do this by addressing the current inequitable tax structure. Working people in Connecticut, those of us in public service, healthcare, child care, food service, and hospitality, contribute more than 25% of our annual income in state and local taxes, while billionaires and millionaires contribute 6%. More than 60% of corporations in Connecticut, including those with more than a billion dollars in federal taxable income, contribute nothing or next to nothing in state and local taxes. These statistics must be a wake up call to legislators and policymakers, but most importantly to working people - we are sick and tired of a rigged system that caters to the ultra rich and corporations, underfunds public programs, and further divides us, exacerbating racial, gender, and income inequality.

I hope this reality of two Connecticuts, a Connecticut that ensures the rich get richer, and a Connecticut that fails working people, compels you to act. We can address this extreme wealth disparity by making bold investments in essential public services, education, health care, housing and municipal aid. We are in an era of teacher burnout, unprecedented shortages among educators, paraprofessionals, school nurses, and mental health professionals, during a time of acute student need. This is why we must enact the Equity Agenda, so we can build a future where all residents, not just the wealthy few, have the resources they need to survive and thrive.

We have an opportunity to solve a problem that Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. described in 1968. We have socialism for the rich and free enterprise capitalism for the poor. That is the problem. And the opportunity and resources to solve it are within reach. We can create a state where everyone has good healthcare to lead healthy lives, high quality childcare and public schools for their kids, a good job to support their families, and a safe place to call home. **I urge the Committee to have the courage to make the right choice and pass House Bill 5673: An Act Concerning The Reformation Of Certain Taxes And Tax Equity.**

Thank you,
Leslie Blatteau,
New Haven, CT